

HISTORY OF MUGHAL ALLAHABAD BETWEEN THE SIXTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Allahabad or Ilahabas, as it was styled by the Mughals, was a subah or province established by Emperor Akbar in 1580 CE. This place has the distinction of being an ancient Hindu pilgrimage-site but for the first time under Akbar, this city gained prominence as a provincial capital. Akbar's Ilahabas, built on the banks of river Yamuna, acted as a gateway to Purab or Eastern empire of the Mughals. Later, Allahabad became a hotbed for many wars of succession which were contested for the Mughal throne. This was the reason why many British chroniclers called it 'the second capital of the Mughal Empire.'; Owing to its strategic importance, the Nawabs of Awadh and Rohilkhand, Marathas and subsequently, British East India Company tried to snaffle the administration of this city by the nineteenth century. Allahabad has the honour of being announced as the capital of India for a day on November 1st, 1858, when Queen Victoria's Proclamation was read here by Lord Charles Canning. In the period that followed the Uprising of 1857, Allahabad was once again chosen as the capital of the North-Western Provinces later United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, a position which it held till 1921. This paper gives a chronological description of the events that followed in the rise and fall of the city of Allahabad in the pre-Independence era.

KEYWORDS: *Allahabad, Provincial Capital, Mughal Province, Queen Victoria's Proclamation, Colonial Administration, North-Western Provinces & British Raj*

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INTRODUCTION

Prayag has been an ancient pilgrimage site of the Indo-Gangetic civilization. Going by the historical and mythological records including Valmiki's Ramayana, *Prayag* was the name given to the area of confluence or *Sangam* of the holy Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati. According to Hindu Puranas and Jain texts, ancient Prayag was a land of penance. It was first Jaina tirthankar, Adinath Rishabhadeva's tapasthali or place of penance. No ancient text mentions Prayag as a nagara or city. In the age of Mahajanapadas, Prayag came under the Vatsa kingdom with Kaushambi as its capital. Through the ages, it has always been a very popular pilgrimage site of Hindus but it is also worth noting that the administrative center of what became Allahabad kept shifting through centuries. In the era before Christ, *Kaushambi* was the capital of the region and continued to be one till the Muslim invasion. Under the Delhi Sultanate, the center was shifted to an area just a few kilometers from Kaushambi, known as Karrah. That remained the administrative city till Emperor Akbar visited this place in 1575 and on seeing the strategic location of the confluence, ordered the establishment of a new city on the fertile and empty patch of land between Prayag and Karrah. In the Akbarnama, Abul Fazl states that the Emperor founded a new city close to the ancient site of Prayag and built a fort there in 1583. He called it *Ilahabas*. This was a new city built by the banks of river Yamuna between the site of the fort of Allahabad and Kaushambi. This fort was built as a Mughal stronghold

to guard Purab or the Eastern Empire of Bihar and Bengal.

There were three contemporary historians in Akbar's regime who give a detailed account of the foundation of *Ilahabas* (Allahabad). According to Abdul Qadir Badauni in his *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, Akbar laid the foundation of Ilahabas in 982 Hijri which dates to 1574. He describes that it was in the same year Akbar visited the holy site of *Hindus* which was already called Ilahabas and initiated the construction of a massive fort near the confluence, or Sangam. Nizamuddin Ahmed, in his *Tabaqat-e-Akbari* credits the founding of Ilahabas to Akbar in his twenty-ninth regnal year which relates to 1584. The most popular of Akbar's court historians Abul Fazl describes the foundation of Ilahabas in *Akbarnama* in the twenty-eighth regnal year of Akbar, i.e. the year 1583. He describes that Akbar divided his empire into twelve *Subahs* (provinces) and Ilahabas was the first subah which shared its boundaries with the subah of Awadh in the North, Rewah of Baghela Dynasty in the South, Agra in the West and Bihar in the East. There were three *dastdoors* (divisions) and ten *sarkars*^[1] (districts) in the subah of Ilahabas. The fort of Ilahabas was made the capital of the subah and had a subedar deputed by the Emperor. The *Subedar* of Ilahabas was one of the most powerful officials of the empire. Two popular British historians, Sir Alexander Cunningham marks that the construction of the fort began in 1572^[2] but Vincent A. Smith considered Abul Fazl's account as the most authentic source and credited 1583 as the year in which Akbar reorganised this *subah* in the month of November.^[3]

The fort of Allahabad had extreme strategic importance for Akbar, that is why he deputed someone from the royal lineage as the Subedar (governor) of the fort. In 1597, he delegated his son Prince Daniyal as the subedar of Ilahabas. It was from this fort in 1601 that Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir) rebelled against his father, Emperor Akbar and announced his independence inside this fort. Khutba was read in his name and he took the title of Shah Salim. He even struck coins in his name from the fort of Allahabad. The revolt was crushed by Akbar and in 1605, Salim ascended the throne as Emperor Jahangir, succeeding Akbar. Major construction inside the fort of Allahabad, including the forty-pillared pavilion, Bargah-e-Chihil Sutoon, Salim Mahal and Diwan-e-aam were completed under Prince Salim's guidance. Shahrarabagh^[4] and Khusrau Bagh^[5] (originally, Charbagh) and Serai Khuldabad were also built under his reign.

In 1624, Prince Khurram (later, Emperor Shah Jahan) revolted against his father, Jahangir when Mirza Rustam was the subedar of the fort. This revolt took a decisive turn after the battle of Jhunsi, when Jahangir sent his second son, Prince Parvez to crush the revolt. In 1628, Khurram ascended the throne as Emperor Shah Jahan and it was at this time that Ilahabas was formally began to be registered as *Ilahabad* in all the official records of the Mughals.^[6] The grand Jama Masjid of Allahabad which was later demolished in the aftermath of the 1857-Uprising was built by Shaista Khan on the orders of Shah Jahan. 1658 witnessed another trouble when Aurangzeb snatched away the Mughal throne from his father and initiated a fratricide. The control of Allahabad fort kept shifting between Dara Shikoh and Shah Shuja till Shuja lost the battle of Khajua against Aurangzeb's forces and fled.^[7]

Prince Dara Shukoh was the disciple of a great sufi saint and a prime advocate of the concept of *Wahdat ul-Wujood* (Oneness of Being), Shah Muhibullah Ilahabadi. The crown Prince built a huge mosque in the *Khanqah* of his preceptor and called it the Shahi Masjid. Built in 1643, it is the oldest existing mosque of Allahabad. During Aurangzeb's reign, popular French traveller Tavernier visited India. In 1665, he reached Ilahabad and stayed here for a day. He also gave a vivid description of the cosmopolitan nature of this medieval city and the power held by its Subedar, in his book, *Travels in India*.^[8]

In 1707, Aurangzeb died and was succeeded by his son, Azam Shah. The *subedari* of Ilahabad stayed with

Abdullah Khan. He, along with his brother Hussain Ali Khan (the Saiyyad Brothers) indirectly ruled the empire by putting puppet rulers to the throne of Delhi. Azam Shah was killed by his brother Mirza Muazzam who ascended the throne as Bahadur Shah. Saiyyad brothers started supporting his son, Azeem-us-shaan against his father Bahadur Shah and took the subedari of Allahabad and Bengal in return.

Bahadur Shah was succeeded by Jahandar Shah who, in turn, was succeeded by Farrukhsiyar only after Jahandar Shah was killed by his brother Azeem-us-shaan who had the support of the Saiyyad Brothers. The following period saw a series of wars between the various claimants to the subedari of Allahabad. Mention needs to be made of Sarbuland Khan and that of Chhabele Ram Naagar who supported Farrukhsiyar against Jahandar Shah. In return, Chhabele Ram was given the subedari of Allahabad after Farrukhsiyar was enthroned. Chhabele Ram is known in history as a mighty man who had the power to challenge the Saiyyad brothers as well. He was succeeded by his nephew, Giridhar Bahadur.

In the period that followed, Muhammad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad became the Subedar of Allahabad. He held the fort till 1732. It was Muhammad Khan Bangash who waged a number of wars on Bundela king, Raja Chhatrasal whose kingdom touched the east-bank of Yamuna near Allahabad. The war continued for five years and Maharaja Chhatrasal sought Maratha Peshwa Bajirao I's help against Muhammad Khan Bangash. After killing Bangash, Marathas entered Allahabad more than once. Maratha invasion in Allahabad destroyed this medieval city to a huge extent. Marathas wanted to keep Benaras, Mathura and Allahabad with them and until 1761, they continued taking '*Chauth*' from these cities.

In the words of historian Bishambhar Nath Pandey,

'...In 1738 the Peshwa demanded from the Emperor that Allahabad, Mathura and Benaras be ceded to the Marathas. On the refusal of Mughal Emperor Mohammad Shah, Raghoji Bhonsle actually raided Allahabad and in 1739, plundered the city and carried immense booty. The raid was on Raghoji's own account. He had not the sanction of the Peshwa who, however, laid claims upon the revenues and tribute.'

In 1743, Amir Khan, the subedar of Allahabad was killed and Nawab Wazir Safdar Jung of Awadh who was still a courtier of the Mughal Emperor in Delhi was made the subedar of Allahabad. Safdar Jung was troubled by Nawab Ahmad Khan of Farrukhabad who was also keen on possessing Allahabad. In 1750, Nawab Wazir Safdar Jung deputed his governor Diwan Nawal Rai^[9] (a Kayastha and one of the most noted courtiers of the Nawabs of Awadh) to lead Awadh forces against Farrukhabad. Nawal Rai was successful in persuading the Begum of Farrukhabad to pay an indemnity of 50 lakhs of rupees. Later, Nawal Rai sensed a conspiracy and in response, he treacherously abducted the five sons of the Nawab of Farrukhabad who were sent in chains to the Allahabad fort and murdered afterwards by Safdar Jung when Nawal Rai was killed by the Farrukhabadi army. Going by the popular belief of the British chroniclers, it is mentioned that the five sons of the Nawab were walled up alive inside the walls of the Fort of Allahabad. The constant tussle between Mughals, Rohillas, Nawabs and the Marathas continued for a large period of time but the actual control of the fort of Allahabad and its provincial administration stayed with the Mughals.

In 1758, Mughal Emperor Alamgir II sent his son Prince Ali Gauhar (later, Shah Alam II) to take charge as the Subedar of Bengal but with the help of the British, Mir Jafar took charge of Bengal and Ali Gauhar took help from Shuja ud Daulah, the Nawab of Awadh to claim Bengal. In 1759, Shuja ud Daulah took over the control of the fort of Allahabad by killing the subedar of this fort. In the same year, Alamgir II was killed in Delhi and Ali Gauhar ascended the throne as

Shah Alam II. Shuja ud Daulah, virtually controlled the Mughal throne by keeping Shah Alam II as a puppet-ruler. In 1764, the combined forces of the Mughals and Nawabs of Awadh and Bengal faced the British East India Company in the battle of Buxar and tasted defeat. Consequently, the Treaty of Allahabad was signed between Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II and Robert Clive of East India Company in 1765.^[10] This treaty granted the Diwani rights of Bengal to the British East India Company and in return, Shah Alam II was given the fort of Allahabad-and-its-periphery to keep under his rule, but the remaining subah was handed over to the Nawab of Awadh, on condition that they would pay an indemnity of Rupees fifty lakhs to the Company. Apparently, the British forces kept Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II under house arrest and gained access through the length and breadth of the Mughal Empire.

In 1771, Shah Alam II tried to parley with Marathas to regain the throne of Delhi and somehow escaped from Allahabad. Once again, Marathas tried to capture this city but the British forces did not let this happen. After Shah Alam II escaped to Delhi, the British East India Company sold the fort of Allahabad to Shuja ud Daulah.^[11] In the year 1774, Shuja ud Daulah died and was succeeded by his son Asaf ud Daulah. The Company increased their annual revenue of paramountcy and in 1775, a fresh treaty was signed with Asaf ud Daulah in which the Nawab had to pay Rupees two lakh sixty thousand per month to the Company to let their (British) forces guard Awadh. Asaf ud Daulah died in 1797 and was succeeded by his son, Saadat Ali and the paramountcy amount was increased to Rupees seventy-six lakhs per annum. Saadat Ali could not pay the amount and in 1801, he sold the erstwhile subah of Ilahabad to the Company to get rid of all his debts.^[12] It was under the governorship of the Nawabs of Awadh that Allahabad which once stood as the capital of the subah was reduced to a shabby and desolate dusty town. There have been many incidents of riots between the *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims which destroyed a number of properties in the city. Nawabs of Awadh also razed Mughal Allahabad to build their own capital in Lucknow. The tussle between Muslims and Marathas as well, and the vandalism which followed turned this medieval city to ruins.

Since 1801, the British had direct and full control over Allahabad under Lord Wellesley who initiated the Permanent settlement here.^[13] The travellers who came to Allahabad in the early decades of the nineteenth century including Bishop Heber and Skinner described this city as a desolate town of North India. William Davies giving his evidence before a committee of the House of Lords, said:

'When I re-visited Allahabad in 1809 I found its main Bazar almost deserted. Many prominent business houses were found closed. The flourishing industries of the town were almost in decaying condition. Some activity was observed in the grain market where Company's British agents were transacting forward contracts in castor and linseed.'

The importance that Allahabad acquired in trade and industries during Akbar's beneficent rule faded at the advent of the East India Company. In 1857, Allahabad revolted against the British forces under the leadership of Maulvi Liaquat Ali of Mehgaon (a village in Kaushambi). After a brave resistance of more than a week, the city fell to the onslaught of General James George Smith Neill who is remembered in history as the 'Butcher of Allahabad'. Kaye and Malleeson write:

'Vengeance exacted in Allahabad was so mercilessly complete that the inhabitants, to escape shooting and hanging, fled for their lives. The punishment inflicted was indiscriminate and terribly severe; so much so that when Havelock reached Allahabad he found corpses hanging from almost every tree. He found the dead bodies littered throughout the town and fire still smouldering from hundreds of houses inside the city.'

Allahabad was briefly made the capital of Ceded and Conquered Provinces of the East India Company around

1833 before it was eventually transferred to Agra in 1835. The actual rise of Allahabad from a dusty medieval town to a premier city of the Raj started in 1858 when on 1st November, Lord Charles Canning read Queen Victoria's famous proclamation from this city. British historians have called it the Magna Carta of British India. On that day, Allahabad was made the capital of India for a day^[14] and then onwards, it was announced to be the Capital of North Western Provinces. Major development and colonial facelift took place in this period.

This major development work included the establishment of the High Court of the province in Allahabad which was shifted from Agra in 1869. The persistent efforts of Sir William Muir resulted in the establishment of Muir Central College in Allahabad in 1872 which evolved into a full-fledged University of Allahabad by 1887, as the fifth oldest in India (after Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Lahore Universities). The Board of Revenue, the Auditor General's office, the Thornhill and Mayne Memorial Library (which briefly served as the Legislative Council of the province), Police Headquarters, were all established in Allahabad to revamp this place into one modern capital of a British Indian province. In 1902, North Western Provinces and Oudh was renamed as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, but Allahabad remained as its capital. In 1910 and 1911 major planning of the roads and other infrastructure took place under the august governorship of Sir John Hewett. It was because of his consistent efforts that the largest exhibition in India was organised in Allahabad in 1911 which even witnessed the first official airmail of the world that flew from its grounds.

Allahabad was a chosen city for the consolidation of colonial rule in the Indian Subcontinent but after the partition of Bengal in 1905, Allahabad became the heated center of freedom struggle under the leadership of Nehrus and the likes. Prof Jevens in his, 'Preliminary Report on the importance of Allahabad' says,

'The growth of Allahabad as a city will depend much on its industrial and economic development. Its educational and cultural importance will also contribute to this end. The printing trade will grow for educational work, legal books and daily newspapers as well as for government requirements. Its central situation gives it an advantage in the publishing trade. Subsidiary industries such as the manufacture of paper, printer's ink, binding cloths and mechanical book binding could easily be established with little encouragement.'

In 1921, Allahabad received a setback when after the consistent efforts of Sir Harcourt Butler and because of his unfathomable love for Lucknow, he snatched away the status of a provincial capital from Allahabad and shifted the capital of the province to Lucknow.^[15] In 1935, the name of the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh was shortened and began to be styled as the United Provinces. India gained independence in 1947 and United Provinces continued to function from Lucknow. In 1950, the Constitution of India was adopted and the United Provinces was renamed as Uttar Pradesh with its capital remaining in Lucknow. Though the High Court still functions from Allahabad, other major administrative units of the province have been shifted to Lucknow. Allahabad has continuously been overshadowed by this relatively new capital, Lucknow and still losing prominence in terms of the provincial administration.

CONCLUSIONS

Allahabad which was established as a military and cultural base by Akbar, and which was once identified as the second capital of Mughals^[16] turned into a desolate town by the late-eighteenth century but was extensively revamped and planned into a provincial capital under British Raj in the post-Uprising period. It, further, reached its zenith as an important administrative center of India during the extremist and Gandhian phase of the Indian freedom struggle. In the post-independence era, this city stood bereft of any significant administrative privilege.

The culture of Allahabad and its glorious past makes it a city of great significance but unfortunately, recent unplanned changes in the city have given a huge blow to its monumental and cultural aspects. Allahabad which was once the chosen seat of the Mughal and British provincial administration; and which was known for its highfalutin lifestyle till the mid-twentieth century, turned into a dusty, non-significant city by the wake of the twenty-first century. Allahabad, today, stands on the ruins of its own majestic past.

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